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EAST TIMOR

Query: **Speaker = Gibson* and East Timor**

Article: **5** of **5**

Date: 26 March 1992 Page: 1191

Speech in the context of Miscellaneous

Speaker: Gibson Mr G.D.

Electorate: MORETON
Party: ALP
Government: YES

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EAST TIMOR

Mr GIBSON (Moreton)--Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to re-enter the debate without closing it off.

Leave granted.

Mr GIBSON--I thank the House for its indulgence. At this time, some four months after the Dili massacre, it is appropriate that the House reconsider the motion and review what has occurred over the four months since we last debated this issue. It is clear that a great deal of activity has occurred and we need to look at the actions taken by both the Australian Government and the Indonesian Government in response to the tragic events of 12 November 1991.

When I moved the motion in the House on 29 November last year, I did so with a deep sense of sorrow and distress at the massive loss of life that had occurred in Dili and a sense of frustration that it appeared that, after 16 years of occupation of East Timor by Indonesia, the Indonesian authorities had still not learnt any lessons about the way in which to supervise East Timor.

Since that time I think Indonesia has faced a lot of international pressure, a lot of criticism and justified condemnation over this massacre. Probably it is fair to say that the events of 12 November have become very much a watershed in Indonesian politics because the Indonesian Government's response to the massacre has been the most dramatic that I have ever seen within Indonesian politics and has resulted in some fundamental changes in domestic Indonesian affairs and in the relationship between the Indonesian Government and the Indonesian armed forces. Some of the changes are very welcome. They do not go far enough, but I think they are a healthy start and I welcome them.

I would like to spend a few moments examining what has occurred in the last four months and to comment on where I think we should be going from here. Firstly, the Indonesian Government set up a commission of inquiry into the events, and that commission visited Dili and spent some considerable time speaking to a range of people who were either witnesses to or participants in the events of 12 November. From that inquiry we have had a fairly strong report which has clearly criticised the actions of the Indonesian military. It has also criticised the actions of the East Timorese who participated in the demonstration. It has recommended action by the Indonesian Government to pursue the participants involved in the massacre.

This is the first time that such a commission of inquiry has occurred and I think it came as a bit of a shock, particularly to the Indonesian military forces, that they would be subjected to such an inquiry. It is very important that it has occurred, and I think it has taught the Indonesian military a very important lesson.

Since that time action has been taken against the people identified in the commission of inquiry's report and a number of military officers have been demoted or have been subject to court martial or have had various other punishments inflicted upon them. Whether or not that is sufficient punishment for the massacre of over 100 people is an important question, but the fact is that it is the first time that the Indonesian Government has taken any sort of action like that, and I welcome it.

I might say, however, that I certainly do not welcome the court action, the charges that have been laid against East Timorese who are accused of subversion and who are facing court trials and possible death sentences if they are found guilty. It appears to me quite strange that the people who are the victims of the massacre, the people who have suffered massively from 16 years of occupation, are the only ones who are really actually facing any sort of punitive measures or any severe punitive measures against them. Nevertheless, for the first time, I think, in Indonesia's history since independence, action has been taken against military officers for their excessive actions, and I welcome that.

There has been a considerable amount of effort by the international community, including Australia, to address some of the fundamental issues regarding the Indonesian

occupation of East Timor. One such issue is the Indonesian military forces' appalling human rights record. The Australian Government has been an active participant in discussions with members of the Indonesian Government to try to convince them that they must change their attitudes and they must change the way in which they deal with the people of East Timor. I welcome the fact that the Indonesian Government has recognised that its human rights record is not good and that there is a need to change. But fundamental to any resolution to this East Timorese question is a recognition that the last 16 years of Indonesian administration has proven to be a total failure. Despite all their efforts and the pouring in of probably hundreds of millions of dollars into East Timor, the Indonesian Government has not convinced the East Timorese people that being part of Indonesia is in their best interests. They have abjectly failed in that objective. The East Timorese people do not wish to be part of Indonesia. I think they had made that clear time and time again.

I know that the Australian Government has a policy which recognises East Timor's incorporation into Indonesia and on a number of occasions in this House I have indicated my opposition to that policy and my total disagreement with it. I do not believe that we, as a country, have a right to give up any other peoples' right to determine their own future and their right to be a sovereign nation. We do not have that right. We would not like it if any other country did that to us and I do not think we have the right to do that to the East Timorese people. However, be that as it may, the Australian Government does have a responsibility to try to ensure that the East Timorese people do have some opportunities to live in peace and freedom within the Indonesian confederation. I have urged the Australian Government on a number of occasions to raise with the Indonesian Government the need to consider some form of autonomous operation for East Timor within the Indonesian confederation.

With the pending visit of the Australian Prime Minister (Mr Keating) to Indonesia, I think it now gives us another opportunity to assert those two fundamental points. One is that Indonesia's control of East Timor for the last 16 years has proven to be a failure and that they need to totally change direction, totally change their policies, remove all their heavy military presence in that province and start bringing about a peaceful existence for the East Timorese people. The second point is that the Indonesian Government needs to give the East Timorese people some autonomous power to control their own affairs.

That is not inconsistent with the Australian Government's policy of saying that the Australian Government accepts incorporation. I think that the Indonesian Government can allow the East Timorese to have some semi-independent authority over their own affairs without the constant presence of Indonesian military forces and without the constant intimidation, harassment, beatings and torture that has accompanied that military presence. I would urge the Australian Prime Minister to pursue those two questions with the Indonesian Government in his visit to Indonesia in late April and I also urge the international community to support those measures.

Concerning the other points that have been outlined in this resolution, the Australian Government and the Australian Foreign Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, have worked hard to implement a number of those measures. One of those has been to seek the establishment of an Australian consulate in Dili. We have requested that and have been seeking negotiations with the Indonesian Government on that. That has not yet been achieved but we are hopeful that that will occur.

We are also talking within the United Nations and the broader international community about exerting further pressure on Indonesia to come to the party and to ensure that its human rights record dramatically improves, particularly with regard to differences of political opinion and the rights of people in Indonesia to assert their own political views. I hope that, over time, Indonesia will learn a very strong lesson from the massacre and will recognise that to be accepted in the modern international community it has to recognise the basic rights of people to express their points of view and to be able to live freely. *(Time expired)*

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hollis)--Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting Thursday.